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THE PRAISE OF ATHENS IN GREEK TRAGEDY

In the plays of the three great Athenian tragic poets there are, as is well known, many allusions to Athens and many passages in praise of Athens and the Athenians—their glorious origin, history, and traditions, their magnanimous deeds in mythical and heroic times, their humanity and altruism, their regard for justice and mercy, their respect for freedom and the rights of man, and their veneration of the gods. These tributes may consist of a mere epithet, such as 'glorious', applied to Athens (κλεινὰ 'Αθήναι), or they may inspire a whole tragedy, as, for example, the Suppliants of Euripides, of which play the writer of the Hypothesis says, 'this drama is an encomium of Athens'.

This feature of the Attic drama has been severely condemned by some critics. Even the motives and the sincerity of the great playwrights themselves have been impugned on the ground that, in the passages I have in mind, for the sake of winning the dramatic prize they truckled to the popular love of flattery. Indeed, does not Aristophanes say (*Acharnians* 635-640: compare *Equites* 1115-1116) that the Athenians were so vain and so extraordinarily susceptible to flattery that, if one called Athens 'shiny' (λαπαί: an epithet more appropriate, he insists, to sardines), he could get any reward? Keble¹ is of the opinion that Euripides touches upon the subject of the state in almost all his tragedies because the arrogant Demus brooked it ill if any occasion to hear its own praise were passed by. Furthermore, he holds, Euripides catered to that lust to the great injury of tragedy. Jerram² affirms that "This persistent laudation of Athens often exceeds the limits of a self-respecting patriotism". So also Müller says³, "Euripides seeks out and eagerly lays hold of an opportunity of pleasing the Athenians by exalting their national heroes and debasing the heroes of their enemies". Guglielmino⁴ uses the chauvinistic passages in Greek tragedy in the effort to prove that the poets strove for 'immediate effects', intentionally arousing the patriotic sentiments of their audiences. Professor Flickinger⁵, going a step farther, maintains that the winning of the prize was the ultimate object to which the other motive was contributory. "...I believe", he says (xvii), "that the tag⁶ at the end of Euripides'

Iphigenia among the Taurians, *Orestes*, and *Phoenician Maids* and the parallels from Greek comedy confirm my interpretation...." Again, he says (217):

...fifth-century tragedy does reveal how the tragic poets tickled the palates of their auditors. They did this in two ways: first, they appealed to national pride by rewriting the mythology in such a way as to assign to Athenian worthies a part which non-Attic tradition did not recognize; and secondly, they aroused the chauvinistic spirit by the sentiments, whether eulogistic of Athens or derogatory to her enemies, which they placed in their characters' mouths....

On page 219 he declares that "...Equally effective with any jingoes in the audience would be the scene in the *Persians*...." where, in answering Atossa's questions, the chorus of Persians shows the strength and the ideals of Athens. He continues thus:

...From a dramatic standpoint these questions are out of place, since Atossa's ignorance is improbable and is shown to be feigned by vss. 348 and 474 f.... Aeschylus valued dramatic verisimilitude less highly than the fervent response that each of these couplets would evoke in every Athenian breast.

So we see that the tragic playwrights...knew how to commend themselves to the good graces of the populace....

Let us now briefly examine Attic tragedy to see the extent to which praise of Athens was employed by the playwrights, why and how this theme was used, and to discover whether this praise is justifiable or explicable on artistic grounds.

Praise of Athens is found in marked degree in the *Persians* and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, in the *Oedipus Coloneus* of Sophocles, and in the *Suppliants* and the *Heracleidae* of Euripides. This motif was evidently stressed also in a lost play, the *Erechtheus*.

The *Persians*, written in 472 B. C., eight years after Salamis and seven after Plataea, was a happy choice for a dramatic subject, although it had been used by Phrynichus. Greece saved from the Barbarians and the Hellenes victorious in their native land, largely through Athenian strategy and valor, constituted a theme at once worthy of a great dramatist and of compelling interest to an Athenian audience. It is unnecessary to discuss this familiar play in detail; suffice it to say that, while the scene is Susa (the Persian capital) and all the characters are Persians (not a single Greek or Athenian is mentioned in the drama), yet the play is Greek in feeling and in religion, and the frustration of the grandiose ambition of the Persians and the triumph of the Greeks are completely and vividly revealed by the Athenian playwright. In the

To my mind this concluding tag to the plays, which may have been added by another hand, is nothing more than a stereotyped prayer for victory. For victory, of course, all concerned in the production of the play were striving. <Mr. Way's translation of Euripides was published originally in three volumes (London, Macmillan, 1894, 1896, 1898). Later (by 1912), this translation was incorporated, in four volumes, in The Loeb Classical Library. For the passage quoted above in this note from Mr. Way's translation of Euripides see The Loeb Classical Library version, 2.409. C. K.>.

¹See John Keble, *Praelectiones Academicæ*, Chapter XXIX. Keble's work, written in Latin, and published in 1844, is quoted by C. S. Jerram, in the Introduction to his edition of Euripides, *Heracleidae*, 7 (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1907). ²*Ibidem*.

³K. O. Müller, *History of the Literature of Ancient Greece*, Translated by George Cornwall Lewis, 370 (London, Robert Baldwin, 1847).

⁴Francesco Guglielmino, *Arte e Artificio nel Dramma Greco* (Catania, Francesco Battiato, 1912). For a review, by Professor Thomas D. Goodell, of this book, see *Classical Philology* 9 (1914), 96-98.

⁵Roy C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama* (University of Chicago Press, 1926).

⁶Mr. A. S. Way renders these verses thus:

"Hail, revered victory:
Rest upon my life; and me
Crown, and crown eternally".

Persians there is much that is flattering to Athenian pride, for, in a sense, the whole drama is a glorification of Salamis. But who will say that the praise was undeserved and that the pride of the Athenian audience was not legitimate? Who will assert that the theme used at this time was inappropriate and that the motives of the dramatist, who himself was a veteran of the victorious war of defense, were unworthy? With truth does Aristophanes⁷ have Aeschylus say (I give Rogers's translation^{7a}):

Then next the *Persians* I wrote, in praise of the noblest deed that the world can show,
And each man longed for the victor's wreath, to fight and to vanquish his country's foe.

Aeschylus won first prize in this dramatic contest. Was it awarded to him because of flattery in this play pleasing to the ears of the judges, or because of the intrinsic merits of his work on a sympathetic theme?

If the *Persians* belongs in the category of patriotic plays, the *Eumenides* is aetiological as well as patriotic. The hero Orestes, like many another refugee in early Greek times, takes refuge in hospitable Athens, where he is tried before the Areopagus. The august Court is founded by the goddess Athena for this very purpose. Thus a divine origin is ascribed to an institution that was, in the eyes of Aeschylus, glorious and worthy of eternal reverence, and is described by the chorus of the *Eumenides* (704-706) as a 'tribunal untouched by gain, revered, quick to wrath, watchful guardian of those who sleep'. Granting that certain words of praise applied to the Athenians suggest an ideal and a wish rather than actuality—compare e. g. the description of Athens as a 'just' land (805, 912), as 'the fortress of the gods, the glory of the divinities of Greece, the savior of their altars' (719-720), and the words, 'ye folk of the city, ye that are seated nigh unto Zeus, ye beloved of the beloved Maiden, . . . nestling beneath the wings of Pallas, the Father holdeth ye in reverence' (997-1002), yet we are compelled to admire the skill of the dramatist in choice of theme, execution of details, and the achievement of an impressive spectacle. Shall we not agree with the Athenian judges that the *Eumenides* is a worthy concluding drama in a trilogy to which was awarded the first prize in the dramatic competition of the year 458 B. C.? It must be remembered that this trilogy comprised two magnificent plays (the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*) wherein Athens and the Athenians play no part at all.

In the *Oedipus Coloneus* of Sophocles there are many passages and references in which praise of Athens and her children occur. Nor is this surprising when we find that the playwright has chosen his own birthplace, Colonus, a suburb of Athens, as the scene of the play, and has used a local legend which connected the end of *Oedipus* with the hill and the deme of his nativity. In this play the qualities in the Athenian character which are especially lauded are those that are traditionally assigned to Athenians; besides, they are called forth, in the plan, by the need of the suppliant *Oedipus*.

In 260-261 the hero says (I give Jebb's translation^{7b}):
" . . . Athens, as men say, has the perfect fear of Heaven <θεοσεβείστας>, and the power, above all cities, to shelter the vexed stranger, and the power, above all, to succour him". Theseus, virtuous founder of the Attic state, noble, sympathetic, compassionate, and *ἐπεικής*, addressing Creon, affirms (912), "... Thou hast come unto a city that observes justice, and sanctions nothing without law . . ."

Oedipus, who has shown all confidence in the piety of Athens, saying to Creon (1006-1007), 'If any land knows how to worship the gods with due rites, this land excels therein . . .', is not disappointed in his pleas. He thus expresses his gratitude (1115-1127):
" . . . among you, above all human kind, have I found the fear of heaven <τὸ εὐσεβές>, and the spirit of fairness <τὸ ἐπεικές>, and the lips that lie not . . ."

The finest passage in this play and one of the most beautiful lyrics in Greek literature is, of course, the famous ode (668-719) in praise of Colonus and Attica, of Athena and Poseidon, and of the gifts of these gods—the olive, the horse, and the oar—which have made the land great. Surely not even the most cynical critic could suppose that this inspired lyric was not written from the heart or believe that it was inserted with a view to catching the votes of the dramatic judges!

In the Attic plays of Euripides, however, the laudation of Athens and the Athenians at times becomes excessive. Three of his plays—*Suppliants*, *Heracleidae*, and *Erechtheus* (not extant)—dealt directly with Athens; in several others, e. g. *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Medea*, although the scene is not laid in Attica, and Athens and the Athenians are not primarily concerned with the story, yet Athenian institutions and rulers are linked with the tale. The *Suppliants*, the *Heracleidae*, and the *Erechtheus*, all belonging probably to the first ten years of the Peloponnesian War, not without good reason are patriotic plays, written to glorify Athens and to reveal to the embattled Athenians, engaged in a life and death struggle with Sparta, the bravery and the heroic exploits of their ancestors, to the end that these might be emulated. Consequently, the freedom, democracy, humanity, and magnanimity of the early Athenians and their rulers are naturally dwelt upon, but at times, to modern feeling at least, to an excessive degree.

The *Suppliants* and the *Heracleidae* are tracts. They are generally admitted to be perhaps the worst plays of Euripides. Both sing the praises of Athens as giving generously and with great sacrifices succor to the oppressed. In the *Suppliants* Theseus by force of arms aids Adrastus and the Argives to rescue their dead from the Thebans; in the *Heracleidae* Demophon, son of Theseus, gives sanctuary in Attica to the children of Heracles and punishes their cruel pursuers, Eurys-theus and his Argive army. The fault, however, in these plays is not in the scene and in the story chosen, but in the lack of restraint and of good taste in the material used, and also in the rhetorical and wordy dialogue and in the artificial characters. Compare the

⁷Frogs 1026-1027.

^{7a}The translation of Aristophanes by Benjamin Bickley Rogers (all the plays) is easily available now in The Loeb Classical Library (three volumes, all published in 1924).

^{7b}Sir Richard C. Jebb, *The Tragedies of Sophocles Translated into English Prose* (Cambridge: At the University, 1904).

Theseus of Euripides, who is vain, boastful, verbose, and pedantic, with the Sophoclean hero, who is genuine, noble, modest, and dignified. In the Suppliants Euripides forgets his drama and halts the action while he permits the founder of Athenian democracy to wrangle with an impudent herald on such topics for debate as 'Resolved that there is more evil than good in the world', 'The vanity of human ambition', 'Tyranny versus democracy', 'War versus peace'. The keynote of the Heracleidae is the freedom and democracy of Athens. Again and again the words *ἑλευθερία* and *ἑλευθερος* occur in the play.

This, however, must be remembered—although it is forgotten all too often by modern critics—that, undramatic as these patriotic plays of Euripides may seem to modern taste, they have, in generous measure, features quite apart from the element of praise of Athens that would commend them to the contemporary Athenian audience for which they were written. They are rich in spectacle and are provided with effective opening and closing scenes. Further, argument and debate, no matter how prolix, were welcome entertainment to ears now attuned to the new rhetoric and sophistic and greedily open to them. It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the praise of Athens in these patriotic plays, which were produced during a period of national crisis, has a more reasonable explanation, as well as a more attractive one, than mere ignoble pandering, for the sake of the prize, to the vulgar taste at the expense of dramatic and artistic propriety.

At the beginning of this paper certain adverse criticisms of this feature of praise in the drama of Athens and her institutions were given. At this point I wish to quote critics who take the opposite position. Decharme⁸, for example, expresses these opinions (121, 123, 142):

Aeschylus and Sophocles occasionally extolled democracy, and contrasted the rule of liberty which prevailed in Athens with the oligarchies or tyrannies which pressed heavily upon other peoples. This was not the result of calculation, as we prefer to believe; they did not desire to be applauded, but to inspire the people with confidence in itself and in the institutions which it had created. The expression of this view, however, is quite rare in their plays: it is of more frequent occurrence in Euripides. . . .

Euripides satisfied his audience and was probably sincere when he praised the worth of the political institutions of Athens before foreigners, but he seems not to have shut his eyes to the disadvantages of a system which left public affairs in the hands of the multitude. He does not fawn upon the masses; on the contrary he draws a picture of them which, without at all resembling the Aristophanic caricature of good old Demus, is not flattering and merely seeks faithfully to reproduce its model. . . .

The facts . . . show how little justified is the reproach that Aristophanes makes that Euripides does not foster noble sentiments in the souls of the young. We need only to have read the *Children of Heracles*, the *Suppliants*, the fragments of the *Erechtheus*, to aver that Greek tragedy is still in the hands of Euripides what it was in the time of Aeschylus, a school of patriotism.

⁸Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas, Translated by James Loeb (New York, Macmillan, 1906).

In footnote 2 to page 142 M. Decharme says, "Lycurgus (*Against Leocrates*, 101) distinctly says that Euripides chose this story from a patriotic feeling, and that he intended to make of it a lesson for the use of young people".

Professor Goodell's⁹ opinion on this question is of interest:

... It is unfair to the dramatist and his art to forget that he and his audience were all Athenians together. . . . When the Athenian dramatist, sharing the Athenian pride in their country's history or legend, makes a character express a common patriotic emotion and belief, we can not properly call that flattery of the audience, or an artifice for effect, even though the words were sure to call out rapturous applause. The bit of truth in such a view is so partial as to be false. . . .

Professor Samuel E. Bassett, in the course of a brief article¹⁰, has some sensible things to say on this question of praise of Athens in the Euripidean drama:

Euripides was in a peculiar sense the poet of the people. . . .

... <A device for winning the attention of the common people> is the appeal to local pride by means of the laudatory reference to Athens. . . .

... there is some laudatory reference to Athens in all but four of the seventeen genuine tragedies which we possess. . . . It seems a fair inference, therefore, that among the many devices which Euripides employed for gaining and holding the attention of the great mass of his audience, the local reference must be included. This does not prevent us from concluding also that Euripides, the recluse, was, in spite of the innuendo of Aristophanes, one of the most patriotic of poets¹¹ <the italics are mine>.

In conclusion, with regard to the element of praise of Athens in Greek tragedy I present the following considerations.

Every artist naturally wishes his work of art to win favor. In the Athenian dramatic festival there was the keenest rivalry for the prize of victory. The competing playwright chose subjects that, he thought, would be interesting to his audience and to the judges as well as to himself. The topics of the praise of Athens, its autochthonous inhabitants, the foundation of its democracy, the valor and the humanity of its early leaders, its services to Greece in the struggle with Persia were themes that were congenial and moving alike to dramatist and to people. Instead of pandering to low taste the presentation of such matters was inspiring and uplifting. Professor Jebb well says¹²: " . . . An Attic theme was the most interesting a dramatist could choose and he was doing a good work, if, by recalling the past glories of Athens, he could inspire new courage in her sons. . . . "

In a few cases, especially in Euripides, we find extravagance in the praise of Athens or in the abuse of her enemies. The latter was evoked, no doubt, by the passions aroused through the Peloponnesian War; the former was already the fashion, as can be seen in

⁹Classical Philology 9 (1914), 97.

¹⁰A Feature of the Local Hit in the Tragedies of Euripides, The Classical Journal 5 (1910), 273-275.

¹¹For an eloquent defense of the patriotic plays of Euripides see Gilbert Murray, Euripides and his Age, 88-96 (New York, Holt, 1913).

¹²Introduction (page xliiv, § 21) to his edition of the Oedipus Coloneus (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1900).

Thucydides, in the Funeral Speech of Pericles, where Athenian autochthonous origin, spirit of liberality, valor, hospitality to strangers, equality of opportunity and democracy are extolled, and likewise in Herodotus (9.27), where the Athenian spokesmen at Plataea praised Athens as giving sanctuary to the children of Heracles, as rescuers of the Argive dead at Thebes, as having repulsed the Amazons, and as valiant fighters at Troy and at Marathon. Furthermore, these commonplaces were ready at hand for the dramatists in the compositions of rhetoricians and orators.

If Athenian drama were preoccupied largely with Attic myth and history to the exclusion of Greek story and religion in general, and if these laudatory plays consistently had won popular favor, one might suspect the worst and might then condemn the great Athenian dramatists for deliberate narrowness of vision and for the flattery, for selfish reasons, of a local audience. But the truth is that, over against the few plays in which Athens is the scene and the theme, we find many more concerned with Troy, Thebes, Argos, and Mycenae, and with other places and material. Of the thirty-two extant tragedies only five are Athenian in setting and in story (in four others, by Euripides, Athens is introduced in a minor way), whereas six deal with Argos, six with Thebes, five with Troy, and ten with other places and stories.

I do not affirm that the Athenians were magnanimous enough to give the prize to a play which was throughout actually hostile to them or to a play that dwelt upon their national failures. If I did, I should be refuted by the well-known fate of Phrynichus, who wrote and produced 'The Fall of Miletus'; the play had to be withdrawn and its author was fined. But, if there is praise of Athens in Athenian drama, there are also much direct and indirect censure and condemnation of the faults in her democracy and of the selfish demagogues.

If it be true that Euripides was an opportunist who thought to gain popularity and to ride to victory on a wave of patriotic emotion, and by flattery to gain dramatic prizes, he failed lamentably in that endeavor. Though his plays were about ninety in number, he won first prize only five times, we are told. Now these victories were *not* obtained with plays dealing with Athens, but with the Hippolytus, Bacchae, Iphigenia at Aulis, and Alcmaeon at Corinth. He won second place with the Alcestis and also with the Troades. With the Medea he won the third prize. This is indeed a poor reward for a flatterer. The two plays which particularly laud Athens (Heracleidae and Suppliants) seem to have won neither prize nor popularity.

An author's sincerity can, of course, not be proved, but in the light of an examination of Greek tragedy the thesis that Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, betraying their artistic ideals, flattered their audiences and corrupted the people for the sake of the prize is not substantiated.

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CHARCOAL IN ANCIENT GREECE

Professor Knapp, in THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY 27.88 (January 8, 1934), speaks of the extensive use of charcoal by the Romans. Some notes on this fuel, as made and employed by the Greeks, may be of interest.

Charcoal (*ἀνθραξ*, *ἀνθράκες*) was the usual fuel for cooking and for various household uses where heat was needed¹. Portable braziers or basins containing glowing charcoal were used for heating in cold weather.

The chief source of charcoal for Athens was the forests of Mt. Parnes² (compare Aristophanes, Acharnians 348, *ἀνθράκες Παρνήθιαι*). The large deme of Acharnae (the region around the town now called Menidi) was the center of the important industry of charcoal-burning.

Students of Aristophanes will recall that the chorus of the Acharnians (produced in 425 B. C.) is composed of elderly charcoal-burners of Acharnae. The chorus is at first intensely hostile to the hero of the play (Dicaeopolis), who wishes to make peace with the Spartans, the enemy whose incursions into Attica during the early years of the Peloponnesian War had interfered with the livelihood of the members of the chorus³. In a delightfully humorous scene (319-356) Dicaeopolis saves himself from physical injury at the hands of the enraged charcoal-burners only by the device of seizing a charcoal-basket as hostage and threatening death to it, their 'dearly-beloved fellow-demesman and lover-of-coals'.

Ἀνθράκεια is the term for the making of charcoal. Theophrastus⁴, in his discussion of the varieties of the oak, speaks of a poor kind of that tree (the *aspris*), which is

...even wretched for burning and for making charcoal; for the charcoal is entirely useless except to the smith, because it springs about and emits sparks. But for use in the smithy it is more serviceable than the other kinds, since, as it goes out when it ceases to be blown, little of it is consumed. . . .

In another interesting passage⁵ Theophrastus tells what kinds of woods are best for the making of charcoal and how it is made:

...The best charcoal is made from the closest wood, such as *aria* (holm-oak) oak arbutus; for these are the most solid, so that they last longest and are the strongest; wherefore these are used in silver-mines for the first smelting of the ore. Worst of the woods mentioned is oak, since it contains most mineral matter <and so makes much ash>, and the wood of older trees is inferior to that of the younger, and for the same reason

¹This is largely true of modern Greece also. Little coal is found in Greece. Coal, imported from abroad, chiefly from Great Britain, is so expensive as to be beyond the means of the average citizen. Imported stocks of coal, for commercial needs and for the use of steamships, are maintained at Piraeus, Volo, Salonica, and Patras. ²"...the forests of Parnes continue to supply Athens with charcoal as in the days of Aristophanes. . . ." (J. G. Fraser, Pausanias's Description of Greece, 2.420 [London, Macmillan, 1913]).

³In 431 B. C. (the first year of the Peloponnesian War) Acharnae was occupied by the Peloponnesian army under King Archidamus, who devastated the whole region (Thucydides 2.19-23). Many of the rural inhabitants took refuge in Athens. Dicaeopolis asserts (34) that he loathes the city and longs for his country-district that never said, 'Buy charcoal!' The scholiast explains that charcoal was a specialty of the Acharnians, who had an abundance of this fuel and did not need to buy it from others.

⁴Enquiry into Plants, 3.8.7, in The Loeb Classical Library translation (two volumes, both published in 1916), by Sir Arthur Hort (see 1.211). ⁵*Ibidem* 5.9 (Hort, 1.467, 469, 471).

the wood of really old trees is specially bad. For it is very dry, wherefore it sputters as it burns; whereas wood for charcoal should contain sap.

The best charcoal comes from trees in their prime, and especially from trees which have been topped: for these contain in the right proportion the qualities of closeness admixture of mineral matter and moisture. Again better charcoal comes from trees in a sunny dry position with a north aspect than from those grown in a shady damp position facing south. . . . But different kinds of charcoal are used for different purposes: for some uses men require it to be soft; thus in iron-mines they use that which is made of sweet chestnut when the iron has been already smelted, and in silver-mines they use charcoal of pine-wood: and these kinds are also used by the crafts. Smiths require charcoal of fir rather than of oak: it is indeed not so strong, but it blows up better into a flame, as it is less apt to smoulder: and the flames from these woods is fiercer. . . .

They cut and require for the charcoal-heap straight smooth billets: for they must be laid as close as possible for the smouldering process. When they have covered <with sods> the kiln, they kindle the heap by degrees, stirring it with poles. Such is the wood required for the charcoal-heap.

Finally, in 9.3.1 (2.231) Theophrastus refers to the pit that is used by the charcoal-burners, but it seems to be nowhere described.

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SOME REMARKS ON COLOR IN GREEK POETRY¹

Any investigation into the use of color terms by an ancient people immediately surprises us by revealing certain unexpected peculiarities. It is not so much that the writers are color-blind (in the medical sense), since they are obviously capable of making distinctions that color-blind individuals cannot make, as that they are lacking in an appreciation of the beauty of color, as distinguished from the material which is colored, or from variations in light intensity, and seem, as a whole, almost entirely incapable of understanding that differences in the shades of a given color exist.

The evidence I have collected on this topic from Greek literature is all the more surprising, since I base my statements entirely on the writings of poets², who are, as a class, much more susceptible to sense-perceptions than ordinary mortals are, and much more capable of describing their sensations.

The use by Greek poets of terms for 'red' illustrates beautifully their failure to distinguish shades. This reveals itself in two ways.

In the first place, they use the same term for objects which differ so much in shades of redness that it would be impossible for anyone to-day to apply the same specific term, say 'pink', 'crimson', or 'fiery', to all the objects which Greek poets described by a single specific term, *ῥυπρός*, 'red', for instance. In other words, since the Greeks had no *general* word for 'red'

¹This paper was read at the Twenty-sixth Annual Meeting of The Classical Association of the Atlantic States, held at Barnard College, Columbia University, April 28-29, 1933. <Mention should be made here of Dr. Kober's dissertation, *The Use of Color Terms in Greek Poetry* (Geneva, New York, The W. F. Humphrey Press, 1932. Pp. viii, 122. C. K.).

²The period considered in this paper extends from Homer to (about) 146 B. C.

which might be used on all occasions, they used, with little regard for consistency, whatever *specific* term best suited their whim or their meter at the moment.

Homer, for instance, uses *οἶνός* of the sea³ and of cattle⁴, while other writers use it, or *οἶνωπός*, of the flush on the human face⁵. Nicander⁶ describes a pomegranate as *σῖδη οἶνωπή*.

Ἐρυθρός is used indiscriminately of a flushed face⁷, of the color of a lobster⁸ and a poppy⁹, of gold¹⁰ and copper¹¹, of blood¹², and of fire¹³.

Πυρρός (or *πυρρός*), if properly used of fire¹⁴, and of the color of human hair¹⁵ and animal hair¹⁶, cannot be correctly used of a rose: but Moschus¹⁷ so uses it.

In Number 16 of the Anacreontic Poems, in which an unusual number of color terms is employed (7 in 23 short verses), there is evident a confusion concerning the meaning of *πορφύρεος*, which, we know from other evidence, is used for colors ranging from bluish-red to black. In verse 11 the poet speaks of the 'purple locks' (*χαῖται πορφύρεαι*) of a girl, which he also describes in 6-7 as black (*τρίχες μέλαιναι*). We must therefore admit that *πορφύρεος* describes a very dark color (probably 'blue-black') here. But in verse 30 of the same poem the girl's dress is described as *ὑποπόρφυροι πέπλοι*. *Ἐποπόρφυρος* should, if anything, describe a darker (or, at least, a vaguer) shade of the color denoted by *πορφύρεος*: yet, I am sure, the poet does not mean to robe his beautiful lady in black to pose for her picture. Besides, in another poem *ὑποπόρφυρος* is used of a rose¹⁸!

Secondly, this inability to distinguish shades is even more obvious if we consider passages in which several color terms are used in close juxtaposition and are applied to one and the same object, which cannot have at the same time all the different shades implied. What makes such passages particularly strong proofs of my argument is that the same poet is in all these passages using these varying terms together, whereas in the examples given above it was not always the same poet who applied one epithet (color-term) to all the varying objects I listed.

Thus, Aratus, in describing the signs by which weather may be foretold, speaks (797) of the moon as

³Iliad 2.613, 5.771, 7.88, 23.143, 316; Odyssey 1.183, 2.421, 3.286, 4.474, 5.132, 221, 349, 6.170, 7.250, 12.388, 19.172, 274.

⁴Iliad 13.703; Odyssey 13.32.

⁵Sophocles, Oedipus Tyrannus 211; Euripides, Bacchae 236, 438, Cretes 15, Phoenissae 1160.

⁶Alexipharmaca 489-490.

⁷For *ἐρυθρ.* see Apollonius Rhodius 1.1230, 3.121-122, 297-298, 963; Moschus 4.2-3; Theocritus 7.117, 30.8; Callimachus, Lavacrum Palladis 27-28. For *ἐρυθρ.* compare Euripides, Phoenissae 1488; Chaeremon 1.4; Anacreontea 17.20; Apollonius Rhodius 1.791, 3.681. For *ἐρυθρ.* see Dromo 1.5; Menander, Fragments 361, 782, 1090; Antiphanes, Fragment 261.1; Diphilus, Fragment 135.1; Aristophanes, Plutus 702.

⁸Anaxandrides, Fragment 22.

⁹Theocritus 11.57. ¹⁰Theognis 450. ¹¹Iliad 9.365.

¹²For *ἐρυθρ.* see Iliad 11.394, 18.329; Bacchylides 12.152-153; Theocritus 17.127. For *ἐρυθρ.* see Iliad 10.484, 21.21; Apollonius Rhodius 4.472-474. For *ἐρυθρ.* see Aeschylus, Eumenides 265.

¹³Eratosthenes, Fragment 16.5.

¹⁴Compare Apollonius Rhodius 3.1377 *πυρρός* . . . *ἀστήρ*.

¹⁵Bacchylides 17.51; Xenophanes 16.2; Solon 18.1; Aeschylus, Persae 316; Euripides, Phoenissae 32, Fragment 537.2; Theocritus 6.3, 8.3, 15.131; Alexis, Fragment 08.16.

¹⁶Aeschylus, Fragment 110; Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis 225, Hercules Furens 361; Theocritus 4.20, 15.53, 25.244.

¹⁷2.70.

¹⁸Scholia Anonyma 26 (in E. Diehl, Anthologia Lyrica Graeca).

πάντη ἐρευνόμενος, and then goes on to say in the next verse that, the worse the weather, the 'redder' the moon (πυρώτερα φοινίσσεται).

Bacchylides (16.116) speaks of a garland 'dark' (ἐρεμνός) with roses, and Simmias (1.7-8) speaks of islands 'dark' (ἐρεμνός) with reeds.

Euripides, in *Hecuba* 151-153, says that Polyxena is φοινισσομένη because of the 'black' (μελανανγής) flow of blood from her neck. There are many examples of such confused descriptions of blood. I give two more. Apollonius Rhodius (4.472-474) says that 'black blood' (μέλαν αἷμα) 'reddened' (ἐρύθηεν) a white robe, and Moschus (1.9) speaks of 'black blood' (μέλαν αἷμα) which (26-27) 'reddened' (φοινίσσεται) the skin of Adonis, which was 'empurpled' (πορφύροντο) by it.

Aeschylus, on the other hand, in *Persae* 315-317, makes a careful distinction between colors. There he describes a young man as riding on a 'black' (μέλας) horse, and states that the man's 'red' (πυρός) beard is dyed with 'purple' (πόρφυρος) blood.

Perhaps the most annoying disregard of true color in Greek poetry occurs when to nouns color epithets are applied not because the epithets are appropriate, but because they are traditional. Often the term is entirely out of place. Of the twenty odd times, for instance, that 'black blood' (μέλαν αἷμα) is mentioned in the Greek poets from Homer through Apollonius Rhodius, the blood is represented in thirteen¹⁸ as actually flowing from a wound; in more than half¹⁹ of the remaining instances it is still liquid.

I hesitate to give the famous ροδοδάκτυλος Ἥως as an example of the same thing, since the expression is so beautiful and so true, but, after all, when we consider that the expression appears almost thirty times²⁰ in Homer alone, we cannot help thinking that it would be more convincing if Dawn were sometimes 'cloudy', or, perhaps, 'rosy-fingered' and 'saffron-robed'²¹ at the same time!

Euripides, in his *Bacchae*, illustrates the same tendency, when he uses ὤχρος (438) to describe the pallor of Bacchus, whose 'white' (λευκός) skin he mentions in 457. Ὀχρός, 'yellow', and χλωρός, 'green', may appropriately be used to describe the pallor of dark persons, but not that of fair persons.

This mechanical use of terms, combined with the stress that all ancient peoples put on light rather than on color-values, makes us hesitate to say unconditionally that certain words are color-terms, even when we have seven hundred years of poetry from which to judge. It is still possible to argue about the meaning of κύνειος, γλαυκός, χαροπός, πορφύρεος, αἰθός, and κελαινός (I mention only a few of the better known puzzlers).

A good deal of this confusion is due to the fact that there are in Greek poetry few descriptions of nature,

and absolutely no certain mention of the blue sky or blue sea, green trees, or a brown anything.

Among the few descriptions of color in nature which we have are the following.

Apollonius Rhodius (1.777-778) describes a falling star (καλὸν ἐρευνόμενος ἀστήρ) through the night air charming maidens' eyes (κυανέοιο δὲ ἥρος ὄμματα θέλγει). In 1.545-546 he likens the white wake of the Argo to a path through a green meadow (ἐλευκαίνοντο κέλευθοι ἀτραπὸς ὡς χλοεροῦ διειδομένη πεδίοιο).

Euripides (*Helena* 179-182) describes robes dyed with 'purple' that have been stretched out to dry in the golden rays of the sun upon 'green' ivy near the 'blue' (?) water.

In a poem ascribed to Theocritus (23) a lily is compared (30-31) to the whiteness of falling snow. This concept is very familiar to us, but this is the only time it is expressed in so many words in Greek poetry.

In the mock epic, 'The Battle of the Frogs and Mice', we have mention (83) of the 'yellow body' of a frog (ὤχρον δέμας) seen swimming through the clear water (ὕδωρ λευκόν).

Xenophanes (32.1-2) describes a rainbow as πορφύρεος, φοινίκεος, and χλωρός. This passage really shows very careful observation, since, in general, πορφύρεος describes a color range from blue-red to black, and could easily therefore be used for the upper part of the spectrum, φοινίκεος is used for purer reds and orange, and χλωρός for yellows and pale greens. Since Xenophanes is given to careful analyses, we may assume that he has put into verse here the results of his own observations. In general, such an assumption would be dangerous, since, as I have shown above, Greek poets did not observe colors carefully.

But passages like those I have just given are extremely rare. In fact, those listed above comprise almost all that I have been able to find in which two or more colors are used close together to describe some natural phenomenon. The poverty of Greek poetry in this respect is obvious, if we stop to think how many descriptions beautiful in color might be taken from English poetry after a merely casual survey of that poetry. The passages I have omitted depend for their color not so much on nature as on the human figures in the landscape. Pindar (*Olympia* 6. 68-71) offers a good example of what I mean: 'Having put aside her crimson girdle and her silver urn, she bore, in the azure thickets, a child of godly mind. Apollo, the golden-haired <aided her>...'.

In general, violent contrasts of color, especially when great contrasts of light are also involved, alone interested the Greeks. The contrast of black and white had almost as much fascination for them as for a modern dressmaker. The contrast between a white skin or golden hair and the blood that stained it also fascinated them.

Other variegated color-effects were obtained by contrasting materials of different colors.

In the Homeric Hymn to Venus (206) a golden (χρύσεος) goblet containing 'red' (ἐρυθρός) nectar is mentioned.

Hesiod, in describing the shield of Heracles, tells us

¹⁸Iliad 4.149, 7.262, 11.813, 13.655, 21.119, 23.806; Odyssey 3.455; Theognis 349; Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1278-1279; Euripides, *Hecuba* 536; Apollonius Rhodius 4.472-474; Theocritus 2.55, 22.125.

¹⁹Iliad 10.298, 469, 18.583; Hesiod, *Scutum* 252; Bion 1.9, 25. ²⁰Iliad 1.477, 6.175, 9.707, 23.109, 24.788; Odyssey 2.1, 3.404, 491, 4.306, 431, 576, 5.121, 228, 8.1, 9.152, 170, 307, 437, 560, 10.187, 12.8, 316, 13.18, 15.189, 17.1, 19.428, 23.241.

²¹Κροκόπεπλος is used to describe Dawn in Iliad 8.1, 19.1, 23.227, 24.695.

(141-143) that the materials used were *λίανος* (lime, or gypsum), white ivory (*λευκὸς ἔλεφας*), electrum, gleaming gold, and *κύανος*.

Pindar (Nemea 7.78) also mentions gold and white ivory together, and Theocritus (15.123-125) speaks of ebony, gold, white ivory, and 'purple' hangings (*πορφύρεοι τάπητες*) together.

Even in descriptions of human beings comparisons with other objects are often used to connote color.

'The rose flees from his lips', says Bion (1.11: τὸ ῥόδον φεύγει τῷ χεῖλεος). In 2.18-19 he writes, 'a bloom empurpled his snow-white cheeks' (*ἀνθος χιονέαις πόρφυρε παρήσι*).

Theocritus (7.117) compares Cupids to red apples. In the seventeenth of the Anacreontic Poems a boy's cheeks are compared (18-19) to a 'rosy' apple. A neck is like ivory (*ἐλεφάντινος*) in verse 29 of the same poem; in 16.27 it is like marble (*λίγδινος*). In this poem the poet tells the painter to picture his lady's nose and cheeks as like roses mixed with milk (16.22-28 γράφε ρίνα καὶ παρείας ῥόδα τῷ γάλακτι μίξας).

Perhaps the most interesting of these descriptions is that in which Alcman speaks (51-54) of a maiden's hair, which is like pure gold (*χρυσὸς ὡς ἀκήρατος*), and of her 'silvery' face (*τὸ τε ἀργύριον πρόσωπον*). We must also mention here Theocritus's *μελίχλωρος*, 'honey-yellow' (10.28), describing the sunburnt Bambiaka, and the 'emerald-haired sea' (*σμεραγδοχαίτας πόντος*) of Timotheus (6. e. 32).

It must be admitted that such epithets as this last are very unusual in Greek poetry. I should say, off-hand, that there are not more than twenty instances in all the range of Greek poetry which I have studied in which a poet employs color-terms that are unusual and unexpected, yet, on analysis, are found to be basically true. Or, to put it more bluntly, we may say there are only about twenty really poetical color expressions in seven hundred years of Greek poetry.

In all fairness to the Greeks it must, however, be admitted that they labored under a great handicap in regard to color terms, since they had so few artificial colors. Necessity to-day makes us acquainted with color-terms, since we are surrounded by artificial colors.

Let us see what colors the Greeks could produce in cloth. White, of course, could be attained by bleaching. Black could be got by dyeing, but the color so obtained was very uncertain, and it is therefore described as often by *κελαινός*, *θρεμνός*, *κύανος*, or even by *δρφναῖος* and *φαῖος*, as by *μέλας*. Yellow could be obtained from the saffron (there is a long list of color-terms beginning *κροκ-*). The purple snail and the *κόκκος* berry produced various shades of red, red-blue, and violet (described by words like *ιοδνεφής*, *πορφύρεος*, *φοῖμις*, *ἀλουργός*, *κόκκινος*, *κάρκινος*). *Κάλη* is used once to describe a color, and there are mentions of dyes named *Σάρδιακινός*, *Ταραντίνος*, and *Κυζικηνικός*. Apparently it was possible to produce a green dye, since Aristophanes (*Equites* 1406) speaks of a 'frog-green robe', *βατραχίς*.

In spite of the fewness of the colors that could be produced artificially, the Greeks managed, by one means or another, to describe most of the *primary*

colors. Sometimes, though not often, they even discriminated between shades. They realized that an appeal to the senses could be made through the juxtaposition of color-terms, even if their efforts in this direction must often be characterized as violent, or strained.

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The Agamemnon of Aeschylus. A Revised Text, With Introduction, Verse Translation, and Critical Notes. By J. C. Lawson. Cambridge: At the University Press; New York, The Macmillan Company (1932). Pp. xlvii, 168.

In Mr. Lawson's new, critical edition of Aeschylus's great play, the Agamemnon, there is printed on excellent paper, in clear type, a Greek text of the drama with all difficulties removed and all problems apparently solved, since the pages show no brackets, no daggers, no question-marks, and no formal apparatus criticus. In the Introduction the editor promises (xvi-xx) a radical treatment of the text. This promise is fulfilled. The Notes are exclusively of a critical nature.

The volume is thus arranged: Introduction (vii-xlvii); Text and Translation (1-103); Notes (105-168).

Mr. Lawson conceives (Introduction, vii) that the task of an editor of the Agamemnon is "first to present the text, if possible, in the form in which Aeschylus wrote it or, failing that, in such form as would have given unalloyed pleasure to an audience of Aeschylus's contemporaries. . . ." Yet he repeatedly and deliberately repudiates, omits, rewrites, and transposes words, phrases, and verses that all manuscripts have handed down to us and all commentators have accepted. It would seem to be a bit presumptuous on the part of a modern editor to feel confident that he can write Greek verse in such form as would give unalloyed pleasure to Aeschylus's auditors.

Mr. Lawson believes (xvii) that editors are apt to err on the side of conservatism (of this, he says, Sidgwick is an example), whereas the editor should rather be a surgeon (xviii). He holds (xx) that "... the textual criticism of a great masterpiece, given an equal degree of integrity or corruption in the MSS., should theoretically be undertaken with greater assurance than that of some second-rate production". He says further (xxiii): "... I have judged that text <the text given by the manuscripts of the Agamemnon> faulty in lesser or greater degree at about four hundred points. . . . I have accepted at these points about three hundred emendations proposed by others, and have added to them about a hundred suggestions of my own. . . ."

It is impossible here to consider in detail this deluge of textual changes. The text itself will be a mine of material for those specialists who delight in playing for its own sake the game of textual criticism. Here and there are valuable suggestions (e. g. in the note on 233) for the conservative student of the play. I will merely cite a number of passages where Mr. Lawson, in my opinion, has needlessly disturbed the text or mistakenly

emended it. In verses 8, 12, 14, 97 the changes are unjustified; in 102 two words are omitted without warrant as glosses; in 141 Mr. Lawson reads *δόπτοις*, although the word is not known in the sense he would like to find in this passage. In 168 there is an unnecessary change; in 346 Mr. Lawson needlessly changes *τὸ πῆμα*, the good and universally accepted reading, to *μῆμα*; in 386 Mr. Lawson is not satisfied with Hartung's excellent *προβούλου παῖς* (for the unlikely *προβουλόπαις* of the manuscripts), and so he reads the Byzantine word *προβουλευτάς*; in 718 he substitutes, for a sound reading of all the manuscripts, the word *ἀγελακτόνου*, with the remark (page 129), "...The word is not elsewhere found, but its formation is unexceptionable...." At 794 a verse is 'manufactured' and inserted; in 819, in a beautiful passage descriptive of the fall of Troy, verses that glow with the poet's inspiration, Mr. Lawson rejects the poetic and appropriate *συνθνήκουσα* (because, he argues, there is nothing to which *συν-* can refer), and substitutes the banal *συνθρώσκουσα*, found in Aelian only. In 1171-1172 Mr. Lawson's long and labored note and rewriting of Aeschylus show his method at its worst. How much better the result would have been if he had consulted and followed Professor Smyth (in *The Loeb Classical Library*) on this passage! Verses 1262-1263

are without valid reason rejected, and not printed. Verse 1275, an expressive and effective verse, Mr. Lawson drops out on insufficient grounds; he writes "...obviously, I think, the whole line can be dispensed with...." Verse 1306, a verse of great value dramatically, is expelled from the text "as an inferior variant...." Mr. Lawson repudiates 1434, a splendid verse, with its personification, *οὐ μοι φόβον μέλαθρον ἔλπις ἐμπατεῖ* ("hope doth not tread for me the halls of fear": so Professor Smyth), because, he says (160), "(1) we want a future rather than a present...."; (2) *ἐμπατεῖν* "...<must mean> 'to trample upon' and it is so used in the late authors when it occurs; (3) a tenuous reason perhaps to advance—my ear dislikes the jingling rhythm of a line which should be majestic...." Hence Mr. Lawson substitutes in his text a sadly inferior reading—*οὐ μοι φόβον μέλαθρον ἐμπελάσsetαι*, which he translates by "...This house shall have no neighbourhood with Fear...."

There remains the verse translation. If we grant Mr. Lawson his own radically revised text, and give him considerable latitude in his rendering, we can and must praise his translation as an admirable literary achievement. His English version has genuine distinction.

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